

MEETING BETWEEN POPE BENEDICT XVI AND  
THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW I,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SOLEMNITY OF  
THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

June 28, 2008

*On Saturday June 28, in his private library, the Holy Father greeted the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, H.H. Bartholomew I.*

*We publish here below a translation of the Popes address to the Orthodox Patriarch, which was delivered in Italian, followed by the discourse of H.H. Bartholomew.*

Your Holiness,

With profound and sincere joy I greet you and the distinguished entourage that has accompanied you and I am pleased to do so with the words taken from the Second Letter of St Peter: "To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (1:1-2). The celebration of Sts Peter and Paul, Patrons of the Church of Rome as that of St Andrew Patron of the Church of Constantinople, annually offers us the possibility of an exchange of visits, which are always important opportunities for brotherly conversations and common moments of prayer. Thus our mutual personal knowledge grows: projects are harmonized and hope increases, which enlivens us all, that we may soon achieve full unity, in obedience to the Lord's mandate.

This year, here in Rome, in addition to the patronal Feast, is the happy circumstance of the inauguration of the Pauline Year which I have desired to institute in order to commemorate the second millennium of St Paul's birth, with the intention of promoting an ever deeper reflection on the theological and spiritual inheritance bequeathed to the Church by the Apostle to the Gentiles with his vast and profound work of evangelization. I learned with pleasure that you too, Your Holiness, have instituted a Pauline Year. This felicitous circumstance highlights the roots of our common Christian vocation and the meaningful harmony, which we are living, of sentiments and pastoral commitments. For this I give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ who is guiding our steps towards unity with the power of his Spirit.

St Paul reminds us that full communion among all Christians is founded on "one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph 4:5). May our common faith, the one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and obedience to the one Lord and Saviour, therefore, be fully expressed in the community and ecclesial dimensions as soon as possible. "One body and one Spirit"

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St Paul was not afraid to address a strong appeal to the Christians of Corinth among whom disputes had arisen, so that they might be unanimous in their speech, that the dissensions among them disappear and that they foster perfect union of thought and intention (cf. 1 Cor 1:10). In our world, in which the phenomenon of globalization is being consolidated but where divisions and conflicts continue to persist, men and women feel increasingly the need for certainties and peace. At the same time, however, they are bewildered and, as it were, enticed by a certain hedonistic and relativistic culture which casts doubt even on the existence of the truth. In this regard, the Apostle's instructions are particularly favourable for encouraging the efforts to seek full unity among all Christians, so necessary to offer the people of the third millennium an ever more luminous witness of Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Only in Christ and in his Gospel can humanity find a response to its deepest expectations.

May the Pauline Year, which will solemnly begin this evening, help the Christian people to renew their ecumenical commitment and may our common initiatives on the way towards communion among all Christ's disciples be intensified. Your presence here today is certainly an encouraging sign of this process. For this reason I once again express my joy to you all, while together we raise our grateful prayer to the Lord.

ORE, July 2, 2008

ADDRESS OF H.H. BARTHOLOMEW I  
TO POPE BENEDICT XVI

June 28, 2008

Your Holiness,  
Beloved Brother in Christ,  
Pope Benedict,

Glory be to God for all things! For, He has rendered us worthy to share in His bountiful blessings. How can we ever thank Him sufficiently for the divine grace and goodness showered upon us all?

It is with sentiments of sincere joy and earnest thanks that we are participating in the solemn services on the blessed occasion of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostolic Patrons of the ancient Church of senior Rome. The shedding of their sacred blood has proved to be a blessing for the universal Christian Church throughout the ages.

This joyous celebration also provides occasion for our two Sister Churches to stand together in prayer and celebration in order to seal our commitment for reconciliation and strengthen our bonds of solidarity. For our personal presence here today marks a respectful gesture of genuine gratitude in return for the personal presence of Your Holiness 19 months ago at the Thronal Feast of St Andrew, First-Called of the Apostles and elder brother of St Peter, Founder and Patron of the ancient See of New Rome. Such visits have historically provided crucial exchanges between our two Churches as tangible expressions of greater communication through theological dialogue, performed in prayerful expectation of full sacramental communion in the Body of Christ. Our encounters and exchanges — both here and in Constantinople — follow in historical succession of the mutual visitations by our predecessors of blessed memory: Paul VI and Athenagoras, John Paul II and Dimitrios.

Yet another reason for our heartfelt delight is our presence here, together with, faithful pilgrims of the Ecumenical Patriarchate from throughout the world, in order to participate in the formal opening of the Pauline Year, which once again our two respective Churches are celebrating during this anniversary year since the birth of the Apostle to the Gentiles, St Paul, precisely two millennia ago. The Ecumenical Patriarchate announced this anniversary through an Encyclical Letter to all our Churches last Christmas; and we are planning a truly historical journey and unique scholarly conference this coming October on the occasion of the Synaxis of all Orthodox Primate at the Phanar.

Important celebrations have already taken place — in the presence of our official representative — in the ancient city of Tarsus, where the former Saul was born to shape, as Paul the Apostle, the identity of Christianity and transform the history of Western civilization through his radical conversion and apostolic *kerygma*. There, in the Churches of Asia, Minor, the negligible spark of early Christianity is visible and vibrant to this day as a living testimony to an eternal

truth about the Crucified and Risen Lord, as proclaimed by the great Apostle Paul.

Your Holiness, we would like to express our fervent gratitude for the invitation extended to us to share in these solemn festivities. May the great Apostolic Founders and Patrons, Saints Peter and Paul, Intercede for us all before the One whom they faithfully served and widely preached. May they continue to inspire us all with the breadth of their ecclesial vision and with the resolve of their apostolic mission.

"For these things and for all things", in the words of our Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, " let us give thanks to the Lord". Amen.

ORE, July 2, 2008

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